

Washington, D.C. - The House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed H.R. 1815, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006 and H.R. 2528, the Military Quality of Life Act of 2006, paving the way for \$122 million in new military construction at Naval Station Great Lakes and construction of a new Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago. Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) praised passage of both pieces of legislation highlighting the need to improve the lives of our armed forces and our nation's veterans.

"The men and women of our armed forces continue to sacrifice every day to ensure America's success in the global war on terrorism," Kirk said. "It is our obligation to provide them with the best equipment and training as they fight the global war on terror. But we must also provide our armed forces and our nation's veterans with state-of-the art health care here at home.

As a member of the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, Congressman Kirk helped steer \$122 million towards new construction at Great Lakes. The money will be used to build a new drill hall, two new barracks for naval recruits and general infrastructure upgrades.

Kirk was also instrumental in securing language in H.R. 2528 that authorizes preliminary construction and design of a new joint Navy/VA federal health care center in North Chicago. Design work is to be completed by the end of October with construction to begin in 2007. The new hospital will treat veterans, active duty personnel and their families. The plan to combine the two hospitals will offer better care for veterans and active duty patients while also saving taxpayers' money. The new construction will bring jobs to Lake County.

"The Navy is investing heavily in Great Lakes bringing hundreds of high-paying jobs to our communities," Congressman Kirk said. "Building the world's premiere naval and medical facilities benefits our men and women in uniform and fosters economic growth and job creation in eastern Lake County."

Focusing on the needs of military reservists and their families, Congressman Kirk worked with House Majority Whip Roy Blunt to include three provisions from Kirk's Americans in Uniform Act in the Defense Authorization Bill. Many of our National Guard and Reservists work in the defense industry as civilians. There are instances where companies who employ Guardsmen and Reservists have lost contracts while their employees are on active duty. These men and

women returned home finding the Department of Defense had given away their jobs. One of the provisions requires the Department of Defense to use the employment of Guardsmen and Reservists as an evaluation factor in the awarding of defense contracts.

The second provision allows members of the Guard and Reserve under the age of 60, to be eligible for space-available travel benefits immediately upon retirement. Currently, the Guard and Reserve are not entitled to this benefit until the age of 60.

The third provision requires the General Accounting Office (GAO) to report to Congress on employment matters for members of the National Guard and Reserve. The language also requires the GAO to report on the difficulties faced in gaining reemployment once returning from duty.

“Today, the National Guard and our Reserves make up almost half of the forces deployed in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq,” Congressman Kirk said. “Nearly forty percent of reservists suffer a loss of income when they go on active duty. When our country calls, reservists and our guardsmen should not suffer financially while serving on the front line.”

The Senate is expected to pass legislation similar to H.R. 1815 and H.R. 2528. The House and Senate will then meet in conference to reconcile the differences between the two bills.

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